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# Harvard Hates ROTC

## *But that may be changing.*

By Erin Sheley

Cambridge, Mass. -- HARVARD SQUARE is looking strange these days. With red, white, and blue fluttering from every street lamp and storefront, the city affectionately known as the "People's Republic of Cambridge" seems to have undergone a complete makeover. In the wake of September 11, this new patriotic sentiment has revived an old debate: whether Harvard University should allow the Reserve Officer Training Corps to return to campus.

The conflict over ROTC's compatibility with Harvard goes back a generation. Then the issue was Vietnam; now it's gays in the military. A university code prohibits student groups from discriminating on the basis of race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation. This means, for instance, that the university will not recognize single-sex fraternities and sororities; nor, because of the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy, will it allow the formation of a ROTC unit on campus.

Harvard disbanded its ROTC detachment during the Vietnam era, but continued to fund cadets who participated in the program at the nearby Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In 1989, however, Harvard cadet David E. Carney was expelled from the unit when it became known that he was a homosexual. In response, a student-faculty committee adopted a policy that prohibited Harvard funding of further ROTC activities. In addition, ROTC is prohibited from recruiting at student activities fairs, and cadets may not sit for their senior yearbook portraits in uniform.

While Harvard's policy raises numerous financial and logistics hurdles for ROTC participants--not the least of which is finding transportation to MIT for drills in the early morning hours--many cadets have found the symbolic effects of the university's policy even more harmful. Cadet Lieutenant Colonel Charlie Cromwell, commander of MIT's Paul Revere Battalion, decries "an inherent negative stigma attached to any organization not condoned or supported by the administration." Students, he says, "are left asking why. Why don't they allow kids to participate?"

Still, since September 11 the military has enjoyed a higher profile on campus. The Harvard Crimson has run front-page stories about students in the reserves preparing for the possibility of being called up. Newly installed Harvard president Lawrence H. Summers has warned the Undergraduate Council "to be careful about adopting any policy on campus of non-support for those involved in defending the country," and has expressed "pride" in Harvard's cadets.

This changing attitude has encouraged proponents both inside and outside to push for the restoration of a Harvard ROTC program. A group of alumni, including former Defense secretary Caspar Weinberger, '38, has organized "Advocates for Harvard ROTC." The

group has collected over a thousand signatures of alumni, students, and faculty who support the return of the ROTC to campus. The results are hard to gauge. According to David Clayman, '38, the chairman of the organization, "All we've seen so far is that President Summers feels that it's a noble endeavor." He goes on to emphasize the fact that "the inaccessibility of the armed forces to those who are supposed to be the best and brightest in the country does a disservice to the nation." Clayman notes that a similar effort is underway among Yale alumni, to bring ROTC back to New Haven.

Within the college, as well, supporters of ROTC have sought to re-open the debate. Undergraduate Council member John Bash, '03, has announced his intention to put the issue on the table at a meeting of the Student Affairs Committee of the Council. Says Bash, "We need to recognize that the anti-discrimination policy cannot be strictly adhered to, but [must be] judged on a case by case basis. Why do we recognize the football team or women's basketball team? The need is greater than ever for military leaders with the highest intellectual capabilities, as we are engaging in a war that is more about tactics, intelligence, and strategy than brute man and machine power."

The fact remains that the return of ROTC would require a major revision in university policy. According to Clifford Davidson, '02, founder of BOND, a non-political organization for homosexual students and their supporters, "individual communities should be able to establish their own guiding principles. To make exceptions to this would render the community's principle moot, defeating the purpose of creating a policy (and a community) in the first place. Thus, the only argument to be had is whether or not Harvard should do away with its sexual orientation non-discrimination policy."

The issue of ROTC at Harvard highlights the more general tensions of the "don't ask, don't tell" policy. The argument for ROTC restoration--that the university should provide an opportunity to students who want to serve their country--is not unlike the argument of gays who wish to serve their country as soldiers and complain it is unfair to deny them that opportunity.

But Harvard's hostility to ROTC stems ultimately from a deep ambivalence about the military. ROTC was first disbanded during the turbulence of the '60s--long before the phrase "don't ask, don't tell" had ever been coined. For its restoration to take place, what must be overcome is not just a set of university rules, but a legacy of anti-military sentiment, born in the Vietnam era, that ever since has shaped Harvard's attitude towards its ROTC members.

In other words, the serious struggle of the ROTC restorationists is against a history of entrenched opposition to the military in elite intellectual communities. The flags in Harvard Square suggest that may be changing.

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